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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether a stable set of core characteristics found to be associated with creativity in samples of creative adults would also distinguish a group of professional jazz musicians selected for excellence of improvisational ability. A second purpose of the study was to see whether such differences found between groups of professional adults would also be found between similar groups of adolescent musicians. A total of 60 male professional musicians (30 jazz and 30 symphonic) and 60 male student musicians (30 jazz and 30 symphonic) were asked to respond to items of the Adjective Check List (ACL). The ACL failed to distinguish between jazz and symphonic players at every level. Findings raise questions about the generalizability of the ACL scale. (LP)

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THE ADJECTIVE CHECK LIST AND MUSICAL CREATIVITY

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Despite the extensive literature in the psychology of creativity, there have been few investigations regarding the creativity of musicians. For the most part, investigations into musical creativity have been limited to describing the composing process (Cowell, 1926; Reitman, 1965) or examining correlates associated with student grades in a music composition course (Khatena, 1971).

Apparently in studying musical creativity, researchers have overlooked the improvising jazz musician. In the jazz solo, the musician is evaluated by peers for ability to produced sustained creative improvisation. These improvisations might be considered instant composition. Although the same standards are not brought to the judgment of improvised solos as to formal composition, they often could be. The symphonic musician, on the other hand, functions as a highly trained technician performing the created work of the composer under the interpretive direction of a conductor. Originality in this situation would result in unemployment. It seems likely that the difference in musical roles might be reflected in the personalities of musicians who have chosen to perform them.

The purpose of this study was to see whether the "stable set of core characteristics (Barron & Harringon, 1981, p. 453)" found to be associated with creativity in other samples of creative adults (Barron,, 1963; Helson & Crutchfield, 1970; MacKinnon, 1961) would distinguish a group of professional jazz musicians selected for excellence of improvisational ability, from a group of professional symphonic musicians.

Since so many of the studies in the creativity literature use adolescents as subjects, a second purpose of this study was to see whether such differences found between the groups of professional adults would also be found between similar groups of adolescent musicians.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (San Jose, CA, April 18-21, 1985).

METHOD

Subjects:

Sixty male professional musicians, i.e., 30 jazz and 30 symphonic (X age = 40 years.) and 60 male student musicians, i.e., 30 jazz and 30 symphonic (X age = 16 yrs.), were asked to respond to items of The Adjective Check List (ACL), (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980).

Scales:

The ACL was chosen as the measure because it was developed in part to facilitate investigation into personality variables of creative individuals. This check list of 300 descriptive adjectives can be scored for 37 scales including a Creative Personality Scale (CPS). The entire 37 scales were scored for the professional sample only.

In addition to the Creative Personality Scale, a second empirically keyed creative personality scale, i.e., Composite Creative Personality Scale (CCr) (Harrington, 1979) has been developed using data generated by five previous creativity investigations using the ACL (Domino, 1970; MacKinnon, 1962; Smith & Schaefer, 1969; Taft & Gilchrist, 1970; Van Zelst & Kerr, 1954). Both creativity scales were scored for the entire sample of 120 subjects.

Procedure:

All subjects were performers on instruments found in the typical jazz organization. These include wind instruments (both brass and reed), drums and piano.

Professional jazz players had recorded improvisations with a recognized jazz group. Approximately one third of the jazz professional subjects had nationally distributed, major label recordings as leader. These subjects were nominated for the study by a nationally recognized authority in jazz education. Symphonic professionals were members of either the San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose Symphony Orchestras, or the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra.

Student jazz players were selected on the basis of their improvisational ability demonstrated during performance at a competitive jazz festival in which their school jazz band participated. In each case this selection was made by an official festival judge who was not aware of the specifics of this study. Each student jazz player was matched with a

symphonic player from the same school, nominated by the school band director.

In addition to the ACL, a short information sheet was filled out by each subject. This sheet included certain demographic questions as well as a question about whether the subject composed or arranged music.

RESULTS

Analyses were two (experience level: professional or student) by two (type of music: symphonic or jazz) analysis of variance. No significant F ratio's were found.

To further explore these data, the experience level category was collapsed as a means of increasing the power of the statistical tests used. Again, no significant differences were found between the combined groups of jazz and symphonic musicians on the two ACL creativity scales.

Due to the expense of scoring, only professional subjects' protocols were scored for all 37 ACL scales. Here again, there were no significant differences.

Finally, using the responses of the professional musicians only, the possibility of a "musician profile" on all ACL subscales and items was considered. To do this, first the group means for each of the 37 ACL scales were plotted for each of the professional groups. An inspection of these data revealed that neither group varied more than three points from the standardization mean of 50 on any of the 37 scales. Next, in an attempt to find any field specific patterns within the item pool, each of the 300 adjectives that make up the ACL was correlated with type of music: symphonic or jazz. Again, only chance fluctuations were observed.

Yet, Chi-Square analyses carried out on the question about composing and arranging music, a more traditional focus for the study of creativity in musicians (Cowell, 1926; Reitman, 1965), yielded significant differences. Jazz players both professional and student, indicated that they were actively involved in composing or arranging music to a greater degree than were symphonic players ($X = 14.03$, $p<.001$ with $O'=.48$.) When professional subjects were analyzed alone in order to eliminate the possible confounding factor of school assignments, $X = 19.98$, $p<.001$ with $O'=.58$. In fact all 30 jazz professional subjects reported that they composed or arranged music.

DISCUSSION

The ACL, chosen for its psychometric versatility and the fact that it was developed to facilitate studies of creative adults (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980), failed to distinguish between the jazz and symphonic players at every level - from two specific creativity scales, through scale profile analysis, to an analysis of each item.

Thus, a group of subjects chosen for the excellence of one type of creativity (improvisation) who reported engaging in a second type of musical creativity (formal composition) are, according to the ACL, no different from the symphonic professionals whose job doesn't include improvisation and only a few of whom reported composing or arranging music.

The Creative Personality Scale (CPS) was developed using item vs. criterion correlations while the Composite Creativity Scale (CCr) was empirically keyed, yet neither scale distinguished between groups of musicians shown to vary on traditional criteria of musical creativity.

These findings raise questions about the generalizability of at least these two ACL scales.

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